

## Building Costs.

[We have received the following clipping from Mr. Irvine, from a Sydney paper, and it will be of interest to our readers as showing the increases in costs of building in Australia during the past ten years.]

A remarkable comparative table, showing advances in building costs in a period of 10 years, is published by the *Australasian Manufacturer*, which says:—

The housing question is assuming growing seriousness in Australia. Beyond all question the housing accommodation in this country is utterly inadequate. Of course, the chief cause is the dearness of houses. Wages and the cost of building materials have risen so enormously, and Governmental restrictions with regard to rents, especially in New South Wales, are so onerous and far-reaching, that men with capital to invest are avoiding the erection of houses and seeking a return for their money in other directions. The result is that all sorts of people, and particularly the working classes, have to pay high rents for very indifferent dwelling places.

A few figures will enable the reader to gauge the situation. The following table shows at a glance that increased wages, at least in New South Wales, are to a very big extent responsible for the increased cost of building:—

Occupation.	Wages per Hour—	
	1910.	1920.
Painters—First grade ...	1/3	2/2
„ Second grade ...	1/	(all 1 grade)
Carpenters ...	1/4½	2/3½
Stonemasons ...	1/6	2/6 11-16
Plasterers ...	1/4½	2/9
Plumbers ...	1/4½	2/3½
Bricklayers ...	1/6	2/9 to 3/1½
Builders' labourers ...	1/	2/0¾
Hodcarriers ...	1/2	2/3
Slaters, tilers, and shinglers ...	1/4½	2/5

But the cost of materials has risen even in a greater ratio than wages, as the following table (also relating to N.S.W.) makes evident:—

Material.	1910.	1920.
Bricks (at kiln), per 1,000 ...	£2	£3/8/
Lime, per ton ...	£1/15/	£4/11/
Cement, per bag ...	4/4	6/4
Oregon, per 100 ...	18/	£3/5/6
Hardwood, per 100 ...	20/	£1/16/
Galvanised iron, per ton ...	£18	£61
Linseed oil, per gallon ...	3/6	12/6
Whitelead, per ton ...	£36	£95/10/
French tiles, per 1,000 ...	£12	£19
4in. earthenware pipes, per foot	6d.	7d.
6in. earthenware pipes, per foot	7d.	9½d.

## Box Timber Contract.

Judgment was delivered recently by Mr. Justice Schutt in a claim lodged by James Ormond and Randal James Alcock, of Collins Street (who carry on business as the Robur Tea Company), against Thorold Wilhelm Gunnerson, of William Street, timber merchant and importer. Plaintiffs claimed damages for breach of contract to sell and deliver 750,000 superficial feet of white pine, required for boxes to contain packets of tea. It was alleged by the plaintiffs that they purchased the timber at the wharf at a price of 11s. per 100 super. feet; but that the defendant delivered only 455,000 feet, and refused and neglected to deliver the balance, although repeatedly requested to do so. Plaintiffs claimed that they thereby suffered damage to the extent of £4,300.

The defence was that any contract made by defendant with the plaintiffs was with R. and P. Gibbons, Ltd., timber millers, New Zealand, and that the contract was frustrated by various circumstances, such as influenza, floods, and fire, and the absence of transport from New Zealand. The hearing of the case lasted 14 days.

In his judgment Mr. Justice Schutt said that the plaintiffs had quite failed to satisfy him that there was any breach of the defendant's obligation under the contract to do his utmost, or to use every endeavour to meet the plaintiffs' wishes in the sense which those words should be understood. On the contrary, the evidence for the defendant led him to the conclusion that there was no such breach. It followed, therefore, that in his (Mr. Justice Schutt's) opinion there was no foundation for the claim made in the action. As to other defences raised, having regard to the view he had taken, it became unnecessary to decide whether the defendant contracted in such circumstances as to exclude personal liability, or whether such personal liability, if originally existing, was afterwards excluded by the subsequent election of the plaintiffs to treat Gibbons and Company as the party liable or whether the contract was "frustrated." Proceeding, Mr. Justice Schutt said that in order to save expense, if possible, should the matter go any further, he understood that the parties desired that he should fix the amount of damages which he would have awarded had he come to the conclusion that the plaintiffs were entitled to succeed. Upon consideration he fixed the amount at £2,715. As the plaintiffs, however, were not in his opinion entitled to recover, judgment must be entered for the defendant, and he ordered that the plaintiffs pay to the defendant three-fourths of the total taxed costs, including the costs of the pleadings, discovery, and interrogatories.

Mr. Latham and Mr. Eager (instructed by Messrs. Davies and Campbell) appeared for the plaintiffs, and Mr. Owen Dixon and Mr. Clyne (instructed by Messrs. Akehurst and Lawrence) for the defendant.